

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01

ACDA-07 IO-13 SSM-03 MCT-01 /081 W

-----110636Z 000756 /21

P R 101721Z JAN 77

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1255

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0192

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, LE

SUBJECT: SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON

1. ASKED COS SHIHABI JANUARY 10 TO BRIEF ME ON HOW SYRIA CURRENTLY VIEWS SOUTH LEBANON SITUATION. SHIHABI OPENED WITH COMMENT THAT SYRIAN FORCES TODAY HAD MOVED INTO JUMBLATT'S HEADQUARTERS AT MOUKHTARA. THIS WAS A POLITICAL RATHER THAN MILITARY REQUIREMENT. AFTER HAVING MOVED ADF FORCES WITHOUT INCIDENT INTO DEIR AL-QAMAR AND BEIT AD-DINE, SYRIANS BECAME AWARE THAT CHRISTIAN RIGHT WAS QUESTIONING SYRIAN WILL TO PROCEED, ALLEGING THAT SYRIANS WERE SOFT ON JUMBLATT. (JUMBLATT HIMSELF HAD BEEN INTIMATING THAT HE ENJOYED A SPECIAL IMMUNITY AND THAT ADF FORCES WOULD NOT COME NEAR MOUKHTARA.) THIS STORY COULD ONLY HAVE BRED FURTHER TROUBLE. JUMBLATT HIMSELF WAS AT MOUKHTARA WHEN THE FORCES ARRIVED.

2. ASKED ABOUT PALESTINIAN INTENTIONS IN THE SOUTH, SHIHABI REPLIED THIS ASSESSMENT WAS THAT FEDAYEEN MORALE, BOTH AMONG THE LEADERS AS WELL AS THE RANK AND FILE, WAS CURRENTLY SO LOW THAT THEY WOULD NOT ATTEMPT PROVOCATIVE  
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CROSS BORDER ACTIONS AGAINST ISRAEL. FIRE FIGHTS BETWEEN MARJAYOUN AND KHIYAM HAD STOPPED AND DID NOT APPEAR LIKELY TO SPREAD.

3. TO THE BEST OF SYRIA'S KNOWLEDGE, THE PORT OF TYRE HAD NOT BEEN USED FOR ARMS SHIPMENTS FOR AT LEAST THE PAST MONTH. SYRIA HAD FORBIDDEN THE UNLOADING OF

A SHIPMENT OF HALF TON AND ONE-AND-A-HALF TONS TRUCKS FOR THE PALESTINIANS AT SIDON TWO WEEKS AGO. HE UNDERSTOOD THIS SHIPMENT HAD BEEN SUBSEQUENTLY DELIVERED TO NICOSIA WHERE IT BEING HELD IN FREE ZONE.

4. THE LEBANESE ARAB ARMY IS NOW ONLY A SMALL IRRITANT. AL-KHATIB CONTINUES TO COMMAND A SMALL FORCE OF BETWEEN 200-300 TROOPS DIVIDED BETWEEN TYRE AND SIDON. SHIHABI DOES NOT BELIEVE THESE MEN WILL FIGHT FOR AL-KHATIB; THIS IS MERELY THE CORE GROUP WHICH HAS NOT YET SLIPPED AWAY TO JOIN UP WITH SYIANS FORCES OR SARKIS. AL-KHATIB HIMSELF HAD MADE OVERTURES TO THE SYRIANS FOR RECONCILIATION BUT DAMASCUS HAD REJECTED THEM.

5. I NOTED THAT LEBANESE LEADERSHIP WAS STILL PESSIMISTIC ABOUT ITS PROSPECTS FOR FIELDING ITS OWN FORCES IN THE SOUTH IN THE NEAR FUTUR. SHIHABI ACKNOWLEDGED THAT SITUATION WAS VERY COMPLICATED" FOR SARKIS BUT SAID THAT DAMASCUS REMAINED OPTIMISTIC THIS COULD BE MANAGED WITHIN A FEW WEEKS TIME, ONCE THE LEBANESE LEADERSHIP MADE SERIOUS EFFORT TO RECONSTITUTE ITS REGULAR ARMY.

6. SHIHABI THEN REFERRED TO OUR CONVERSATION OF LATE NOVEMBER AND SAID HE COULD STILL FORESEE THE NEED FOR ADF UNITS IN THE SOUTH SHOULD PRESENT CONDITIONS DEGENERATE. HE REITERATED HIS ORIGINAL POINT THAT ONLY THE SYRIAN ELEMENTS OF THE ADF COULD RESTORE ORDER SHOULD IT BREAK DOWN. IT WOULD BE BEYOND THE SUDANESE, ABU DHABIANS, ETC. TO DO SO. SYRIAN ELEMENTS MIGHT BE NEEDED IN  
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TYRE AND TO PREEMPT USE OF THE RECENTLY BUILT AIRPORT. I WARNED HIM NOT TO UNDERESTIMATE THE CONTINUED ISRAELI SENSITIVITY TO THE ENTRY OF SYRIAN TROOPS IN THE SOUTH. THEY WERE ABSOLUTELY OPPOSED TO THE PRECEDENT OF SEEING EVEN A FEW SYRIANS TAKE UP POSITIONS IN THE SOUTH. THE LAUNCHING OF THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN IN ISRAEL HAD IF ANYTHING LIKELY STRENGTHENED GOI FEELINGS ON THIS SCORE.  
MURPHY

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## Message Attributes

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**Review Markings:**  
Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
22 May 2009  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009